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Vähäkangas, Auli Maria

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On the need of conviviality: Experiences of religious diversity of Nordic youth

Auli Vähäkangas, University of Helsinki, Finland. Auli.vahakangas@helsinki.fi

& Annette Leis-Peters, VID Specialized University, Norway. AnnetteRose.Leis-Peters@vid.no

Abstract:

This article studies young people's experiences of religious diversity in two Nordic localities in Finland and in Norway. In the Nordic discourse, the concept of conviviality gained importance through the LWF's policy document *Seeking Conviviality* in 2013. Haugen's three "Rs", respect, relationality and reciprocity will be used as a starting point for the analysis of the experiences of young people. The aim of the study is to understand how young people experience religious diversity and what these experiences can contribute to Haugen's reformulation of conviviality. The results show that conviviality tends to be more easily discussed than practised. They indicate that living in the same neighbourhood with youth from other religious traditions helps to face religious diversity but that this coexistence does not in itself generate reciprocity. Rather, in order to really live together there is a need to get to know each other's practices and values more deeply.

Key words:

Conviviality, religious diversity, young people, Nordic countries

Nordic youth in the context of growing religious diversity

This article studies young people's experiences of religious diversity in two Nordic localities in Finland and in Norway. Dorottya Nagy and Martha Frederiks argue in their recent study that there is an urgent need to research the importance of the role of religion in the public sphere, especially in contexts which are affected by migration.¹ The Nordic countries are a context which has been characterized by religious homogeneity for centuries, but they are now experiencing a fast growing diversity due to migration.² Traditionally, state and church had been closely intertwined in the Nordic countries. However, since the late 19th century, task sharing between parish and municipality increasingly has become sharper.

¹ D. Nagy and M. Frederiks, "Introduction," in *Religion, Migration and Identity: Methodological and Theological Explorations*, eds. D. Nagy and M. Frederiks (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 1-8.

² I. Furseth (ed.) *Religionens tilbakekomst i offentligheten? Religion, politikk, medier, stat og sivilsamfunn i Norge siden 1980-tallet* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2015); J. Haynes and A. Hennig (eds.), *Religious Actors in the Public Sphere: Means, Objectives and Effects* (London: Routledge, 2011).

Industrialization and the growing differentiation in the industrialized Nordic countries have resulted in a model in which religion has been increasingly located within the private sphere, while the growing number of tasks that state and municipality assumed responsibility for, such as welfare provision, is located in the public sphere. Thus, religion has become highly privatized and largely distanced from the public sphere.³ However, this division between the public and private spheres has been challenged during recent decades, not least due to migration.⁴

Immigration of people with non-Lutheran religious backgrounds has increased considerably over the last 30 years, but to various degrees in the different Nordic countries.⁵ This new migration has occurred in a context in which religion has not only been invisible in the public debate, but also largely overlooked in scientific studies about the living conditions of young people. This can be illustrated with recent Norwegian youth studies. Religion and religious organizations are hardly mentioned as resources when discussing the situation of young people.⁶

While religion is rarely mentioned in general youth studies, there is an increasing number of projects which focus explicitly on religious identities of young people. For example, one of the larger recent quantitative studies on youth and religion was conducted in Sweden.⁷ In this study Mia Lövheim showed that, apart for the small group of young people who are active in religious organizations, most young people mainly have contact with religion through their friends, the school, TV and the internet, but not through family or religious organizations.⁸

³ P.K. Botvar, *Religion uten kirke: Ikke-institusjonell religiositet i Norge, Storbritannia og Tyskland*, Diaforsk report nr. 10, (Oslo: Diakonhjemmets høgskole, 1993); I.M. Høeg & B. Krupka, "Confirmation Work in Norway" in *Youth, Religion and Confirmation Work in Europe: The Second Study*, eds. F. Schweitzer et al. (München: Gütersloher, 2015), 234-244; J. Seppo, "The Freedom of Religion and Conscience in Finland," *Journal of Church and State* 40/4 (1998), 847-872.

⁴ I. Furseth (ed.), *Religious Complexity in the Public Sphere: Comparing Nordic Countries* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

⁵ G. Brochmann and A. Hagelund (eds.), *Immigration Policy and the Scandinavian Welfare Policy 1945-2010* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); P. Kivistö, *Religion and Immigration: Migrant Faiths in North America and Western Europe* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014).

⁶ T. Øia, *Innvandrerungdom. Integrasjon og marginalisering* [Youth with migration background. Integration and marginalization] (Oslo: Nova, 2005); T. Øia, & V. Vestel, *Møter i det flerkulturelle* [Meeting in the Multi-Cultural] (Oslo: Nova, 2007).

⁷ M. Lövheim, "Ungas religiositet: tidigare forskning och nya frågor" [The religiosity of young people. Earlier research and new questions] in *Religion som resurs? Existentiella frågor och värderingar i unga svensks liv* [Religion as resource. Existential questions and values in the lives of young Swedes], eds. M. Lövheim & J. Bromander (Skellefteå: Artos, 2012), 77-106.

⁸ A. Sjöborg, "Centralt eller perifert? Ungas kontakter med religion i vardagen" [Central or peripheral] in *Religion som resurs? Existentiella frågor och värderingar i unga svensks liv* [Religion as resource. Existential questions and values in the lives of young Swedes], eds. M. Lövheim and J. Bromander (Skellefteå: Artos, 2012), 107-130.

At the same time, Arniika Kuusisto et al. show that youth in general hold accepting values towards those with different faiths. This quantitative study (n = 1,000) studied interreligious sensitivity among Finnish pupils in lower secondary school. Young females were found to be skilful in negotiating their views within a rapidly changing pluralistic society. Geographic location and religious affiliation did not contribute as strongly as gender to the interreligious sensitivity of the youth.⁹ A Norwegian-Swedish value study by Per Botvar and Anders Sjöborg which investigates how Christian, Muslim and non-religious young people relate to human rights shows that there are almost no differences between young people of different religious affiliations when it comes to human rights issues related to the public sphere, such as social equality, environmental questions, or freedom of speech. The differences between young people with different beliefs and world views are greater regarding rights that are related to the private sphere, such as family values.¹⁰

These previous quantitative studies provide insight about how young people think in general, but how they relate their values to the diversity in their local communities still needs to be studied. In this article we intend to address this lacuna in the research by investigating the experiences of religious diversity among young people in Finland and Norway. In order to assess the levels of religious diversity experienced by young people, we will use the parameters of conviviality as articulated by the Norwegian researcher Hans Morten Haugen. In the remainder of this article we will first explore the theological concept conviviality. This is followed by a discussion of the Finnish and the Norwegian case-studies respectively. In the last paragraph we discuss our findings and its outcome that a further refinement of Haugen's model of conviviality is required.

Conviviality: respect, relationality and reciprocity

The discussion above concluded that religious diversity challenges the previously homogeneous Nordic context. It is thus important to focus on concepts which help us to conceptualize this new situation and analyse it. Dimeglio et al. argue that it is difficult to find high levels of social cohesion if people do not share values of tolerance and respect diversity.¹¹ An important research area regarding social cohesion is

⁹ A. Kuusisto et al. "Gender Variance in Interreligious Sensitivity among Finnish pupils," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 19/1 (2014): 25-44.

¹⁰ P.K. Botvar and A. Sjöborg, "Views on Human Rights among Christian, Muslim and Non-Religious Youth in Norway and Sweden," *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 25/1 (2012): 67-81.

¹¹ I. Dimeglio, J.G. Janmaat and P. Mehaut, "Social Cohesion and the Labour Market: Societal Regimes of Civic Attitudes and Labour Market Regimes," *Social Indicators Research* 111/3 (2013), 753-773.

related to the concept social capital.¹² Some contributions to the research about social capital point explicitly to the importance of religion and religious agency.¹³ The existence of social capital, in the form of networks, social connections, particular values, and relationships of trust, is identified as a necessary resource which contributes to social cohesion.¹⁴ Forrest and Kerns have concluded: residentially based networks perform an important function in the routines of everyday life. These routines are the basic building blocks of social cohesion. Through them people learn to accept diversity, cooperation, and acquire a sense of social order and belonging.¹⁵

Picking up on the concept of social cohesion, both in various theological disciplines and also in the wider research on migration, a lively discussion of the concept of conviviality has emerged. This notion was first introduced in the 1980's by the German missiologist Theo Sundermeier. Sundermeier used the German term "Konvivenz" which can be translated in English as convivence. The term comes from Spanish and describes the situation when Jews, Christians and Muslims were living together in the territories in medieval Spain that were reconquered.¹⁶ Sundermeier's main argument was that people have to find a new form of existence together and he saw the medieval situation in Spain as an ideal way of living together.¹⁷ Sundermeier criticized the Western hermeneutical tradition of being text-centric and not person oriented and he replaced the standard hermeneutical models with one which focused on the practical problem of understanding the other.¹⁸ Sundermeier stressed how important this praxis is for interreligious dialogue as well as for the possibility of people from different religious traditions to live together side by side.

¹² Robert D. Putnam, "E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century," *Scandinavian Political Studies* 30/2 (2007), 137–174; R. Oxoby, "Understanding Social Inclusion, Social Cohesion, and Social Capital," *International Journal of Social Economics* 36/12 (2009), 1133–1152.

¹³ R. Traunmüller and M. Freitag, "State Support of Religion: Making or Breaking Faith-Based Social Capital?" *Comparative Politics* 43/3 (2011), 253–269; P.D. Numrich and E. Wedam, *Religion & Community in the New Urban America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

¹⁴ Council of Europe, *Concerted Development of Social Cohesion Indicators: Methodological Guide* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2005); P.S. Hardiman and S. Jones, "The European context," in *Youth and Exclusion in Disadvantaged Urban Areas: Addressing the Causes of Violence*, Trends in Social Cohesion, No. 8 (Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing, 2004): 11–103.

¹⁵ R. Forrest & A. Kearns, "Social Cohesion, Social Capital and the Neighbourhood," *Urban Studies* 38/12 (2001), 2125–2143.

¹⁶ A. Novikoff, "Between Tolerance and Intolerance in Medieval Spain: An Historiographic Enigma," *Medieval Encounters* 11/1 (2005), 7–36.

¹⁷ T. Sundermeier, "Konvivenz als Grundstruktur ökumenischer Existenz heute," in *Ökumenische Existenz heute*, eds. W. Huber, D. Ritschl and T. Sundermeier, (München: Kaiser, 1986), 49–100; See also F. Wijzen, *Seeds of Conflict in a Haven of Peace: From Religious Studies to Interreligious Studies in Africa* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007), 230.

¹⁸ D.W. Congdon, "Emancipatory Intercultural Hermeneutics: Interpreting Theo Sundermeier's *Differenzhermeneutik*," *Mission Studies* 33/2 (2016), 127–146.

In the Nordic discourse, the concept *convivencia*, translated as *conviviality* gained currency through the policy document *Seeking Conviviality* that was launched by the Lutheran World Federation in 2013 and that discussed *diaconia* in contexts of diversity.¹⁹ According to this document, *conviviality* encompasses sentiments of the art of coexisting in diversity and is especially used to denote unproblematic encounters with diversity.²⁰ Norwegian researcher Hans Morten Haugen has reformulated the concept of *conviviality* to encompass the promotion of coexistence in the midst of divisions and power, and is more critical towards power structures of the society than theories of social capital or social cohesion are.²¹ In his analyses of *Seeking Conviviality*, Haugen identifies three key aspects of *conviviality*: respect, relationality and reciprocity.²² Haugen writes: “the three “bases” for *conviviality* have a certain practical potential for applicability: the relational nature of human beings; respectful views of others; and reciprocal relationships with others.”²³ All three of these enable the whole community to be more tolerant towards diversity. *Conviviality*, thus, emphasizes the importance of a community characterized by dynamism. Moreover it emphasizes that it is not necessary to group people into insiders and “others” but rather to continue to live together in spite of differences. The goal, thus, is not that people would become similar but that they could live together and learn from their differences.

Haugen’s model of *conviviality* will be used as a starting point for the analysis of the experiences of young people in this article. Relationality is essential when analysing young people’s experiences of religious diversity. Respect, or lack of it, will be identified from the data as well as acts of and attitudes towards reciprocity both in the context of one’s own religious group and between religions. In the remainder of this article we address the following questions:

- How do young people experience religious diversity?
- What can these experiences contribute to Haugen’s reformulation of *conviviality*?

The two Nordic case studies in the YOMA project

¹⁹ T. Addy (ed.) *Seeking Conviviality: Re-forming Community Diakonia in Europe* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2013); see also U. Siirto, “Conviviality: A Core Value of Diakonia,” in *LWF Guide Material to the Themes of the 500th anniversary of Reformation: Human Beings – not for sale*. Ed. A. Burghardt. (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 2017), 53-61.

²⁰ L. Lapina, “Besides Conviviality: Paradoxes in Being ‘At Ease’ with Diversity in a Copenhagen District,” *Nordic Journal of Migration Research* 6/1 (2016), 33-41.

²¹ H.M. Haugen, “Approaches to Inclusive and Equitable Societies: Diaconal Perspectives,” *Diaconia* 6/2 (2015), 150–166.

²² Haugen, “Approaches,” 163.

²³ Haugen, “Approaches,” 161.

The empirical data of the two Nordic case studies were collected in a research project called “Youth at the margins. A comparative study of the contribution of faith-based organizations to social cohesion in South Africa and Nordic Europe (YOMA)”. Both authors of this article were involved in the YOMA project; Auli Vähäkangas lead the Finnish case study and Annette Leis-Peters the Norwegian case study.²⁴ The case studies, mostly based on interviews with young people and representatives of the FBOs, illustrate not only the relationship between young people and FBOs, but also how the young people perceive the local community in which they live. This article focuses on the data of the two Nordic case-studies which mirror rather different situations. While the Finnish case is a small, homogeneous and relatively remote local community, the Norwegian case study took place in a rather new city district of the capital Oslo where more than half of the population has a migrant background. We see the limitations of these two qualitative studies and will not directly compare these very different contexts.

The Finnish case study is located in a small rural community of Lammi. In 2009 Lammi became part of the city of Hämeenlinna which has a population of some over 60,000 inhabitants of which Lammi covers only around 5,000 (12/2013). The Lammi parish of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland (ELCF) has long been an important part of the community. This is clear when arriving in Lammi, as a medieval stone church stands at the very centre. The parish had around 4,800 members in 2010. The second largest religious community is the Pentecostal church which has less than one hundred members. There is also a minute Free Church, which, at the moment of the research, had only around ten members attending its services. The nearest mosque is in the centre of Hämeenlinna town which is an half an hour’s drive from Lammi and not easily accessible with public transportation.

The city district of Søndre Nordstrand is a part of Oslo as the most south-eastern suburb of the capital. Altogether, about 37,000 people live in Søndre Nordstrand. The district does not work like a small town, but has four sub-districts which are poorly connected with each other by public transport. Each of the sub-districts has its own shopping centre. In 2015, 51% of the registered inhabitants of the district had a background in a country outside Norway. Statistically, Oslo is renowned for its west-east economic divide. Both the levels of income and population density are considerably higher in the eastern parts of the city. Søndre Nordstrand is a typical example of an eastern Oslo city district. In the year 2014, the Lutheran majority church in Norway, the Church of Norway, had 12,440 members in four parishes in

²⁴ YOMA received funding from the Academy of Finland and the South African NRF (2013-2016), the Finnish team received additional funding from the Emil Aaltonen Foundation. VID specialized university funded a PhD student for the Oslo case study and gave additional funding for the fieldwork in Norway. Prof. Ignatius Swart and his team were responsible for the South African case studies which are not dealt with in this article.

Søndre Nordstrand. This is just under a third of the population. During the research, 14 other FBOs were registered in the city district. Of these, five FBOs reported public subsidies for a total of 2,973 members, four reported membership figures that also included parishes in other city districts, and five FBOs were not on the public list of those FBOs that are entitled to receive subsidies.²⁵

The total number of those interviewed in the Finnish case study was 42. Interviews were conducted between December 2014 and May 2016. The fact that the period of fieldwork coincided with the peak of influx of refugees to Finland in 2015 profoundly influenced the data collection due to the great number of immigrants arriving in Lammi as well. The youth data consists of twenty individual interviews of young people from 15 to 24 years of age. Three of the individually interviewed youths were asylum seekers and had only recently arrived in Lammi. The youths were also interviewed in three focus group interviews. Two of these groups consisted of youths born in Finland. The structure of these two focus groups was interactive and the focus was on two narratives. The first addressed how youths should face multi-cultural and multi-faith young people and the second one dealt with how one could help youths in a demanding life situation. The first focus group consisted of six 15- and 16-year-old lower secondary school age youngsters. The second focus group was made up of over 18 year olds. The third focus group was conducted with three youngsters in one of the asylum seekers' centres. The structure of this third focus group followed the individual interview scheme but focused on the newcomers' experiences of social cohesion in Lammi. The data of experts working with youth consists of seven individual interviews and one focus group comprised of three experts. Four of them were working for the city in various roles in education and youth work. Another four were working for various religious organizations, two of them in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland (ELCF), one in the Pentecostal Church and one in the Free Church. Finally, one person was working in the reception centre. All data were analysed using inductive content analysis. This article focuses on the data of the asylum seekers themselves and on the views of youth and experts on tolerance and diversity.

The Norwegian case study is an example of a religiously diverse local community. It focused, therefore, on the contribution of FBOs to social cohesion with regard to young people in the city district of Søndre Nordstrand. This means that all the 18 FBOs that were active in the city district have been contacted and most of them interviewed. Only in a very few cases, when it was not possible to establish contact or when

²⁵ B.H. Holte, "Religion and integration: Religious organisations' communication in a diverse city district of Oslo, Norway," article manuscript (not yet published).

the FBO insisted that they had no activities for young people, no interviews were conducted. Altogether, 17 interviews with representatives of 12 FBOs took place. Whenever it was possible to make contact with the youth groups of the FBOs, they were interviewed in focus group interviews. The material consisted of six focus group interviews with 34 young people in total. In addition, two individual interviews with young people, one focus group interview with the youth council of the city district, and seven individual interviews with representatives of the public authorities and of nongovernmental organizations were conducted. The analysis of this part of the article is based on material from the seven focus group interviews with the FBO youth groups (four Christian, two Muslim and one of the city district youth council) and the two individual interviews.

In this article, young people in individual interviews are referred to with a code name Y1, etc., when direct quotations from the interviews are presented. Y indicates ‘young person’ and the number after it indicates the order of the interviewee. The focus group interviews are referred to with F and the experts working with youth with E. The siglum L is added to the Finnish interviews and O to the interviews done in Norway.

Youth learn respect in a small Finnish village

According to data from the case studies, social cohesion seems to have two faces in Lammi. Many of the interviewed youth liked Lammi because it is such a small place and almost everybody knows everybody else. Those with a positive view of communality in Lammi recognized it as a safe place to live, where one is supported by friends and neighbours. These young people found the small size of the community as adding to social support and a feeling of security. There were also those youngsters who considered Lammi to be such a small place where it is easy to be left out of social networks and get caught up in gossip. A 16-year-old girl confirms the idea of gossip in Lammi: “Gossip is born out of nothing ... that’s the worst thing here, when everyone knows everyone here in Lammi, you could pretty much say that everyone’s related here” (Y3, L). There was also the idea that if you had a certain reputation as a youngster, it was hard to change these perceptions later on. Especially those young people who held atypical opinions or who acted differently were the focus of gossip. This was especially the case with young people who were immigrants and therefore easily perceived to be different from the Lammi-born young people. This small town context raised some difficulties in learning to respect youth coming from outside, especially in a situation of a rapidly increasing number of refugees which lead to opening of two additional reception centres in a short time.

The asylum seekers formed around 10% of the population in Lammi in late 2015 and early 2016. The increase in the number of asylum seekers in Lammi was extremely rapid: “It was in the paper yesterday that in the Hämeenlinna area there are 800 asylum seekers, of these just over 500 are in Lammi” (E2). The first reception centre had already opened 2009, and not that many additional young people had entered Finland before 2015. An additional two reception centres were opened in Lammi during the major influx of migrants.

A clear difference in attitudes and experiences is visible when we compare the discussions of youth in focus group one in May 2015 and focus group two in early 2016. Themes of tolerance and diversity were discussed in far more detail in the second group. However, we also must note the older age of the participants and more active involvement in FBOs themselves, which might also have influenced the liveliness of the discussion. Youth in this second focus group shared their positive examples of encountering diversity in Lammi. They found it important to really get to know the new people personally, making the encounter meaningful. One young man who is active in the small Free Church in Lammi shared his experience of the migrant visitors to his home church: “We have been coping ok, no problems. In the beginning it was a bit different, you know, when I have not met such people before, but later it was ok. They can come even every time, I do not care.” (F2, L). Both the Free Church and the small Pentecostal Church had received some Christian families who attended their services. In addition to the migrants attending the Church services some of them also visit the weekly soup kitchen in the Pentecostal church. Also, the vicar of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland (ELCF) explained during her interview that there have been refugees attending the Lutheran services as well. The ELCF had, in addition, been active in welcoming the refugee children into their kids’ clubs for many years. They have good cooperation with the workers of the refugee centre who select the children who will attend (E2, L). There are many more children who would like to attend than can be accommodated, but ELCF wishes to keep the clubs in the Finnish language and help those migrant children who are selected to attend to learn the language while attending. These encounters outlined above show the effort of building ecumenical relations between the Lammi Christians and the Christian refugees arriving in Lammi.

Experiences of diversity had not been easy for some of the youth in a small village. The focus group youth discussed the new situation in Lammi: “Racism did come to mind pretty quickly ... there’s certain folk who don’t talk too kindly to foreigners” (F2, L). These youths are the first to use the term ‘racism’ when discussing attitudes toward the immigrants and the reason for that might be their age. This second

focus group consists of young adults while the first focus group had only school-age youngsters. These older youths further discussed how young people could combat racist attitudes: “Probably the biggest thing that’s lacking in Lammi that I’ve noticed is that there should be more opportunities offered for encounters” (F2, L). All the young people interviewed had seen the migrants in Lammi, but only a few had experiences of personal encounters with them, in other words there has been a lack of really building relationship between youth from various ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Another participant in the focus group shared her experience of encounter: “The oasis is a kinda space in the parish gym hall, they did all kindsa stuff there ... wasn’t a success or nothing, folks didn’t really turn up but at least they tried. Finnish folks are such numpties, they don’t know how to talk to them.” (F2, L). The oasis had been a way for the ELCF to show respect to the newcomers of the community. Many of the migrants to Lammi were Muslims and the ELCF wanted to host them in the gymnasium, not in a Lutheran Church. According to the young interviewee, encounters had been challenging without a common language and without a diligently planned program and focus. This initiative demonstrated, however, an eagerness to build relations and reciprocity. It just did not work out during the first try, at least from the point of view of this interviewed youngster. This example seems to indicate that relationality and reciprocity need time and repeated encounters before they may be realized.

The experts working with youth commented during the interviews that there had been some difficulties between the local and the immigrant youth: “there was some quarrel at the youth center now between the general townsfolk and these asylum seekers. And then the youngsters from Lammi reacted a bit by breaking stuff.” (E2, L). Another expert elaborates the same situation: “We have had to make important calls ... we’ve now got our own warden, a supervisor at the Centre every night... it’s all because it’s a small village, it’s all down to a little nuisance from the locals” (E1, L). However, the changes towards respect, relationality and reciprocity are also clearly demonstrable in the expert interviews which were similarly conducted in early 2016. During these later interviews, most of the interviewees were actively involved in supporting the integration of the newcomers into Lammi on various levels. These activities involved various strategies of building more relationships between young people, for example at the city youth centre in the village.

The asylum seekers explicitly addressed issues of respect, relationality and reciprocity during their interviews. There were practical examples regarding the difficulties of receiving help in a community as an outsider, but also positive experiences of help and feelings of acceptance. The following 23-year-old African man explained: “I was looking for directions. I asked – I tried to stop one lady, but she just

ignored me. This other guy, just showed far away what I am looking for.” (Y14, L). But in the stories of social cohesion of the immigrants themselves, it is not just a question of the level of tolerance meet and how they are perceived as different. They also have their own stories of reciprocity among multi-cultural and multi-faith asylum seekers. The same African young man explains the background of his flat mates at the asylum seekers centre: “Gambia they are Muslims, Ivory Coast they are Muslims. I met one Ghana guy he was a Christian. Most of the time I ask them about their religion.” (Y14, L) He himself adheres to African traditional religion and comes from an African country with the majority being Christians and very few Muslims. He said that it is interesting to discuss differences and similarities of various religions and he does not regard religious diversity to be a problem among the immigrants themselves or with the Christians of Lammi, who had visited their apartment as well. From his explanation, it seems that a group of Christians had visited the apartment of refugees in order to evangelize them. He had enjoyed this visit, during which they shared their views of faith. Later, he was similarly very eager to tell the interviewer about his own beliefs and religious traditions which clearly indicate his interest of interfaith dialogue. The closest mosque to Lammi is in the town of Hämeenlinna half an hour drive from Lammi but without proper public transportation connections. One of the individually interviewed Muslim youths knew of the mosque and had visited it: “I’ve been there twice. The first time was when I got my national insurance number and we went to get it from the police. The other was also a bureaucratic matter, I got to pray there then too.” (Y16, L) It is so difficult to reach Hämeenlinna from Lammi that this young man had only visited the mosque twice and, even then, he had had other primary reasons for the visit. Non-Christian immigrants encounter Nordic societies that are mainly secular with a strong Lutheran heritage, which is physically symbolized by church towers in central locations in cities and in villages. Fridolfsson & Elander studied faith and place in Sweden and their study indicated how important it is for the identity of Muslims to have a real mosque and not only rooms in the basement of an industrial building. “Real” mosques have great material and symbolic importance to the heterogenic Swedish Muslim community.²⁶ To the young immigrants in Lammi, any mosque nearby would be an important source of social cohesion. When youth from various faith traditions know their own background better, they can more easily build relationships also to those from other faith traditions.²⁷ The importance of knowing one’s own faith tradition is the basis of Sundermeier’s early conviviality discussion.

²⁶ C. Fridolfsson and I. Elander, Ingemar, “Faith and Place: Constructing Muslim Identity in a Secular Lutheran Society,” *Cultural Geographies* 20, 3 (2013), 319, 331.

²⁷ Sundermeier, “Konvivenz,” 57-59.

The experiences from Lammi show how a great increase of refugees in a very short time challenged tolerance in a small village. The examples of facing diversity were mainly negative, but the interviewees also had positive examples of encountering the migrants in the village. The positive encounters had happened in situations in which the youngsters and refugees had got to know each other personally. The presence of migrants is, however, so recent in Lammi that there are no long-term examples of living together in a diverse context.

Relating to a diverse reality in Oslo

The most overwhelming impression of the interviews with young people living in the multi-cultural city district of Søndre Nordstrand is that diversity is a self-evident condition of their lives. As the short presentation of the city district illustrated, there are people from many different backgrounds and origins compressed within this locality. Young people are used to this diversity from the time they start kindergarten, or become accustomed to it in school at the latest. The interviews also show that the young people are aware of the social diversity of the city district. Some of them talk about the small flats where big families live. Nevertheless, most young people relate positively to the diversity of the city district. They are proud of coming from a place where many different people meet and they are convinced that this is a city district where a special and novel culture can grow. A boy who now attends a school in the city centre says:

Yes, I have to say that there are some things that I liked much better in Holmia [one of the suburbs of the city district], as for example that you cannot see differences of the people at XX [the new school]. It is like that. Oops, there was a group of friends with three, four or five blond girls who all looked exactly the same, and I think that this gets a little bit boring [...]. (F1, O)

Since the city district has had a history of gaining publicity for its problems (including youth crime and drugs) the young people are very eager to emphasize that to live in the city district is very different from what the media report and what people in the Western parts of the city think upon hearing that they come from this particular sub-district. One of the boys says that he has been asked “if he had seen a murder or if he had seen a gun” (F4, O) when he was taking part in an event outside the city district in the 9th grade. Most of what the young people say when describing their city district could be understood as a plea for

their multi-cultural city district and, thereby, indirectly for diversity. These attitudes reflect what Haugen refers to as respect.

However, not all youths share this positive assessment of living in their city district and find the diverse environment inspiring. Some of them describe their local community as a rough milieu where it is better to be cautious. Since the young people went to school together in the sub-districts of the city district from first to tenth grade (in Norway all children usually go to public schools) they know all the other young people. Thus, they also know who the local troublemakers are and who is involved in crime and drugs. Some girls mention, for example, that they are often exposed to abusive language when they cross public spaces where groups of young people gather. In one of the focus group interviews, most of the girls agree that they have experienced physical infringements as well. Young people who feel threatened in the city district express clearly that they want to leave the district when they are older. They also say that FBOs can function as alternatives or safe places, where they can escape from the harsh city district. One of the teenage girls says:

You are always respected here in church for who you are, in a way and it is a totally different environment here in the church than it is here outside, you know. In a way, here is nobody who is looking down on you or giving you mean comments or so. Everybody respects everybody and so. It is always cosy to come to church. (F1, O)

These examples illustrate that the diverse environment can also be perceived as threatening to young people. Unease with the city district is related to groups that hang out in public places and comment or interact with people passing by. These groups also consist of young people associated (according to the adult representatives that have been interviewed in the case study) with criminality, drugs, violence and a derogatory views toward girls and women. It is striking that the young people do not associate their unease with cultural and religious diversity. They rather emphasize that they know everybody from school and that they know who is involved in the local drug culture. They also underline the positive aspects of religion and that they know about Christianity if they are Muslims and about Islam if they are Christians. They explain that they did not need to read schoolbooks to learn about other religions, but that they went to school with children representing all the major world religions. Since the young people in the multi-cultural city districts often know each other from an early age, it could be argued that there exists a certain relation or relationality between them. This is Haugen's second criteria for conviviality.

However, some of the narratives of the young people illustrate that these relations not only result in respect, but at times also in disrespectfulness and social precariousness.

Young people from both Christian and Muslim groups express views that being a Christian is not always accepted in Norwegian secular society and that Christian teenagers have problems talking about their faith among peers. Muslim young people believe that young people in general are more positive about being a Muslim than about being Christian (F6, O). Being Muslim is something new and exotic while being Christian is more outdated. For the members of the Christian youth groups, living in a multi-religious context actually has advantages. Being together with Muslims makes it easier, for example, to avoid the culture of drinking alcohol among teenagers. They also feel in general that religion is evaluated more positively in their multi-cultural city district than in other parts and contexts of the city where secularity is much more taken for granted among people; with Haugen's concepts one could conclude that a multi-cultural context gives religion and religious young people more respect.

The case study of the Oslo city district shows quite clearly that cultural and religious diversity is nothing new or complex for the young people. The youngsters have grown up in a context of diversity and they consider it normal for young people to come from different religious, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds. If they encounter each other on the street they know exactly who the other young people are and what background they have. This knowledge affects how they interact with the other young people that they meet. One of the mosques in the city district has a strategy to reach out to young people on the street that are at risk of becoming involved in crime and drugs. The representatives of the mosque underline that they only make contact with young people who are Muslim. Asked how they know who is a Muslim, one of the young people in the group says:

Our city district is a small place, right. To be honest, it does not take a long time to see if a person is Pakistani or Somali, and if you know this, you also know that he has a Muslim background. The other thing is that we, most of us are grown up in the city district. This means that we know almost everybody who is our age or younger. Therefore, we know whom we are talking to (F5, O).

Even though some of the young people feel threatened by the context of diversity that they have grown up in, for most of them it is natural to live together with classmates and friends from different religious and cultural backgrounds. Many emphasize that diversity is characteristic of their city district and that they take pride in coming from such a multi-cultural and multi-religious context. Diversity for the young

people in Søndre Nordstrand means that they actually know a lot of young people with cultural and religious backgrounds other than their own. Growing up in a multi-cultural city district also means that religion is a much more natural part of everyday life and conversation than in secular Norway in general. Therefore, talking about religion does not stand out in this city district, while it might do so in many other contexts where young people in Norway grow up. Living in a religiously diverse context has thus prepared the youth for conviviality to live together in diversity.

Actually, reciprocity is harder to find in the case study of the Oslo city district. Neither the pride of coming from a multi-cultural and multi-religious city district nor the fact that they actually have grown up with young people from different religious and cultural backgrounds from a very early age results automatically in friend groups and social networks across these different cultural and religious backgrounds. Even though they know each other and talk positively about each other, Muslim and Christian young people do not seem to spend much time with each other. It is striking that the Christian and the Muslim youth groups in the city district do not seem to organize group meetings between them. It therefore seems that the youth in the studied Oslo neighborhood do not actually practice conviviality, in the full range that is described by Haugen. They rather live parallel to one another, are not involved in interreligious dialogue and do not get to know the religious practices of the other youths.

Conclusions

The previously discussed results from two Nordic localities show that conviviality is more easily discussed than practised. Both in the small rural community of Lammi and in an urban neighbourhood in Oslo, the youth themselves knew who the insiders are and who belong to the group of ‘others’. Even in the Oslo case study, which was characterized by long term diversity, it seems as if the young people still adhere to culturally and religiously rather homogeneous groups. They show respect and appreciation for each other but, in their leisure activities and their social networking, they seem to cross cultural and religious borders only to a very small extent.

Recent research argues that the locality also shapes the migrant’s experiences when the migrants have lived there long enough.²⁸ In Lammi this was not yet the situation; all interviewed migrants were asylum seekers and thus had only recently arrived in the locality. The Oslo youths who live in a multi-cultural neighbourhood, have lived there a long time and the locality had shaped their experience. This seems to

²⁸ Nagy and Frederiks, “Introduction,” 3-4.

confirm the importance of residentially based networks as the basic building blocks of social cohesion.²⁹ To really construct social cohesion and conviviality requires time and the routines of everyday life. In the Lammi situation, both resident and migrant youth were only getting to know each other; the migrants were just learning the ins and outs of everyday life; but in the Oslo situation the migrant youth had developed these routines already which helped them be part of the social cohesion of their neighbourhood. In the Oslo case study, most of the young people perceived their multi-religious and multi-cultural environment as enriching. But the everyday lives that they live seem to be less multi-religious than one could expect given the social structure of the city district. However, all the interviews with young people illustrate that these young people really have experienced diversity as their natural frame of reference. For them, diversity is a practicable and not just a theoretical challenge and resource. The experiences of youth from Finland and Norway show that living in the same neighbourhood with youth from other religious traditions helps the young people to face religious diversity. The concept of conviviality is useful for understanding the situation of Nordic youth in a context of growing diversity. Our research results emphasize both respect and good relationships and lack of interaction and cooperation.

Haugen's refinement of the concept of conviviality was found to be especially useful in understanding the experiences of youth since it helped to illustrate both achievements and shortcomings in living together in diversity. Mutual respect does not lead automatically to close relationships and reciprocity. All three of Haugen's key words- respect, relationality and reciprocity- help the whole community be more tolerant towards diversity. Respect, or the lack of it, was seen in the data of both of the studies of Nordic localities. Even those young people who feel threatened by the rough social climate of the city district did not talk disrespectfully about young people with other backgrounds. Relationality is an important element in any cohesive community in which especially the young members need the support of others to become full members of the community. And the last word, reciprocity, was seen to be a very important part of supporting diversity during the interviews of the refugees. The newcomers did not want to be just receiving from the present community members; they also wanted to be actively contributing to the social cohesion in their new community.

It is more difficult to determine how relational and reciprocal the interaction of young people with different religious and cultural backgrounds is. It seems thus that sharing everyday lives does not automatically lead to reciprocal relationships. It is difficult to determine the parameters of conviviality

²⁹ Forrest and Kearns, "Social cohesion," 21-30.

in different terms. As concept for evaluating and conceptualizing of how people live together in diversity, the concept of conviviality has to be refined and operationalized.